



July 29, 2019

North Reading Zoning Board of Appeals  
via email to Gerard Noel, Zoning Enforcement Officer [gnoel@northreadingma.gov](mailto:gnoel@northreadingma.gov)  
Re: 20 Elm Street (rear), North Reading

Dear North Reading Zoning Board of Appeals,

Thank you for accepting these comments on the proposed NY Ventures LLC development at 20 Elm Street (rear), North Reading, MA. Despite the determination of Mass Housing, it is our firm opinion that the conceptual project design as shown in the NY Ventures application is NOT appropriate for this site. As you are aware from the maps and site plans, the 24.2-acre site proposed for the project abuts the Ipswich River, an important resource and a public water supply for 14 communities, with both high resource value riverbank and other associated wetlands. The project application states that under current zoning in North Reading the development parcel (19.0 acres, currently partially wooded, partially cleared, riverbank, and wetlands) would allow ten single family residences on the property. Current abutting properties are single family homes. The NY Ventures proposal, to build two hundred (200) rental units in five, four-story, 40-unit buildings, with associated infrastructure including hundreds of parking spaces, is not suitable for this site, and would have a direct, negative impact on the Ipswich River, its wetland areas and buffer zones, and its sensitive resources including public and private water supplies.

Before offering specific comments on the project, I would like to provide some background relative to the environmental sensitivity of the site, located within the flow-impaired Ipswich River basin.

The Ipswich River is the most flow-depleted river in Massachusetts due to excessive water withdrawals (ground and surface) and other impacts to the natural water balance in the watershed, including wastewater and drinking water exports, extensive impervious surfaces, and other detrimental land uses. In addition, the Ipswich River is the lifeblood of the North Shore, providing drinking water to 330,000 people every day, and supports significant ecological resources. Thus, protecting its water quality is critical. It is therefore the position of the Ipswich River Watershed Association that every new development or redevelopment project in the watershed does not increase water use or negatively impact water quality in any amount and ideally, such projects will contribute to improving current conditions.

With this backdrop, we have reviewed the application and associated documents, and we offer the following specific comments.

#### Riverfront Area & Wetland Resources

As shown on the plans submitted by the applicant, the southern boundary of the project site has approximately 1500 feet of frontage on the Ipswich River and associated wetlands. The plan also shows a delineated wetland closer to Elm St along the west side of the proposed driveway. We have submitted specific concerns about the riverfront and wetlands areas as shown on the Williams & Sparages Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation (ANRAD) plan under consideration by the North Reading Conservation Commission in a letter dated July 29, 2019. These concerns include the following:

- As shown on the 1962 wetlands map attached to these comments, the original wetlands finger leading from the river in a northerly direction included what is now labeled "R.C. Drain" on the 2019 plan. This historic wetlands area connected directly to the inland wetlands on the northern side of the property close to Elm St. This area, now displayed as upland,

in fact looks to be filled wetland. *The delineation needs to take into account the original wetland soils below the fill and should consider the buried pipe a direct hydrologic connection between these two wetlands.*

- We are aware of several areas of historic filling on the site. We ask that the wetlands delineation take these into account and be sure the delineation is based on soils, not wetlands vegetation.
- Since the Ipswich River is subject to significant water withdrawals, the location of the mean high water bank needs to be carefully assessed (relative to modeled un-impacted water elevations) to accurately delineate the riverfront area of the site.

An accurate delineation of wetland resource areas is particularly important in this case because of the high sensitivity of the 20 Elm Street site.

Water Quantity

The proposal states the development will tie in to the town’s public water available on Elm St. The project should be conditioned to minimize water use to the extent possible, especially non-essential uses such as outdoor water use which does not recharge the groundwater. This is particularly important now that the State’s newly promulgated water withdrawal regulations prohibit any increase in municipal withdrawals from the highly stressed Ipswich Basin. As such, North Reading will be required to live within its *current* permitted volume in perpetuity *such that any new water demand in the town will need to come from existing allocations*. Therefore, it is inappropriate to allow a new development such as this to negatively impact the town’s future without offsetting its new water demand. We offer the following specific recommendations to ensure that water use by the proposed development does not further stress the local and regional water supply:

- The project at a minimum should offset 100% of its projected water use through *both* minimization of its use within the project (e.g. ultra-efficient fixtures, use of rainwater for toilet flushing, etc.) *and* the developer should be required to offset the rest by working with town officials to address water use in other areas of town (e.g. pay a fee for leak detection, upgrade of fixtures in municipal buildings, support a public rebate program, water bank, etc.).
- With such extensive parking areas and impervious cover, the project should minimize its production of stormwater through site design (e.g. minimization of impervious areas) and infiltrate 100% of its stormwater runoff on site.
- Landscapes should be planted with drought-tolerant native species which do not require irrigation (beyond the establishment phase). Automatic irrigation systems should not be allowed as these systems are guaranteed to leak and otherwise malfunction over time and even in normal use will use a lot of water.
- The amount of lawn should be minimized and where required, planted with drought tolerant turf grasses such as fescues. Runoff volumes and rates from the site should equal pre-development conditions.

Water Quality

The most effective tool to minimize impacts of the subdivision on water quality and other wetlands (including wildlife habitat) is to *reduce the proximity of development to wetlands, minimize the amount of development in the wetlands buffer zone and reduce the amount of developed area overall*. Many local wetland protection bylaws in the Ipswich River Watershed have significant no disturbance and additional no build zones within wetland buffer zones to protect wetlands and water resources based on the assumption that development in close proximity to wetlands *will* negatively impact the resource values protected by the buffer zone.

If this project moves ahead, it is particularly important to limit discharges of nitrogen, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, household chemicals, lawn care chemicals, hydrocarbons, salt (deicers) and other contaminants to surface and/or groundwater – all of which would be produced by the proposed development. Any shared or individual wastewater system should be the most advanced possible and be designed to remove nutrients and treat pharmaceuticals and hazardous household waste to the greatest extent possible. We look forward to reviewing more detail around the applicant’s proposed system.

Additionally, we offer the following specific recommendations:

- The project should adequately treat 100% of its runoff on-site.
- Landscapes should be managed organically without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides.
- Non-pervious surfaces should be minimized and use of salt and chemical deicers should be minimized/prohibited in favor of sand and environmentally safe deicers.
- Development within the wetlands buffer zone should be minimized.
- A third party should be contracted with to maintain the stormwater and wastewater treatment systems in perpetuity.
- The amount of development should be reduced as the proposed size and scale will not allow these objectives to be met.

While some of these measures exceed minimum regulatory requirements, they are readily achievable using modern Low Impact Development Standards and should be required as a general practice in environmentally sensitive areas such as this. The Ipswich River Watershed Association can advise the developer and/or community on the implementation of these measures at low cost and stand ready to assist you in any way to achieve these protections. We strongly recommend that you require that the developer meet with us to achieve these improvements.

Please incorporate these comments into the public record on this matter, and please contact me if you have any questions about these comments. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Wayne Castonguay  
Executive Director

Cc: North Reading Board of Selectmen c/o Michael P. Gilleberto [mgilleberto@northreadingma.gov](mailto:mgilleberto@northreadingma.gov)

Cc: North Reading Planning Board c/o Danielle McKnight [planning@northreadingma.gov](mailto:planning@northreadingma.gov)

Cc: North Reading Conservation Commission c/o Leah Basbanes [lbasbanes@northreadingma.gov](mailto:lbasbanes@northreadingma.gov)